

TO: Carnegie Hero Fund Commission

Oliver Building--Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania--Commission Questionnaire--May 22, 1967

Answers to "Information Desired Regarding the Act of Heroism" 28, 1966--Milwaukee.

1--The act took place a little after 11 P.M. on Monday, November 28, 1966, in the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In income being incapacitated by his wounds from carrying on his business for nearly six weeks.

2--Rescuer was named Ralph Sacks, who lives at 2741 N. Frederick Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53211. He was 26 years old, about five feet five inches tall and weighing about 150 pounds. He is a library bookseller, specializing in rare books and American history, doing much of his business with universities and libraries and operating out of his residence.

3--The only eye-witness of the actual rescue and wounding of Ralph Sacks was Mr. Sacks saved the life of Fred B. Blair, 60 years old, whose manager of Mary's Bookshop, a used book store, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, located at 318 West Juneau Avenue in that city, where the action took place. Mr. Blair lives at 3236 N. 15th St., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53206. Mr. Blair is not related to Mr. Sacks.

4--The act took place in Mary's Bookshop, 318 W. Juneau Avenue, Milwaukee, Wis., a used book store located in an area of urban renewal, about 5 blocks from the main thoroughfare and business street of downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin Avenue. The store is a small area (about 600 square feet of space) in a building housing two other places of business and a rooming house, upstairs, adjacent to a bank building, and adjoining an alley.

5--Mr. Sacks had entered the bookshop an hour or so before, and was completing a small business transaction with Mr. Blair. The assailant, a youth of 17, came into the store just as Mr. Sacks was about to leave. Mr. Blair was behind the counter and Mr. Sacks was facing him. A number of shelves running transversely across the room obscure vision of the front door. While completing the transaction with Mr. Sacks, Mr. Blair, sitting behind the counter, heard the door open and saw a young man come around the shelves and face him at a distance of about 10 feet, standing in an aisle on the west side of the store. The youth asked if he were Mr. Blair, and, hearing a reply in the affirmative, drew from under his coat a 22 caliber target pistol, with a clip of ten 22 long bullets in it, and pointed it at Mr. Blair. Mr. Sacks called out: "He's got a gun!" Mr. Blair dropped behind the counter. Mr. Sacks leaped at the youth and caught the arm holding the gun. When Mr. Blair emerged from the end of his counter, both Mr. Sacks and the assailant were out of his sight behind the bookshelves. He heard a struggle and incoherent voices, and the sound of four shots rapidly fired. Seizing a small child's toy baseball bat which had come with a box of books some time before, Mr. Blair rushed down the east side of the store and found Mr. Sacks struggling with the assailant, and holding firmly onto his right hand, in which the gun was still held. Mr. Sacks' firm grasp prevented the youth from firing more shots. Mr. Blair subdued the youth with the child's bat and forced him to drop the gun and surrender. Mr. Sacks appropriated the gun and went for the police, while Mr. Blair held the youth on the floor with the bat poised over him. On the arrival of the police, it was discovered that Mr. Sacks had been wounded, and both he and the assailant were taken to hospitals for treatment. The assailant suffered minor head wounds from the child's bat.

5--Mr. Sacks was wounded in three places. One bullet pierced his right shoulder muscles; another went through his forearm between the elbow and wrist. A third bullet (one of the other two) creased his right side above the right hip for about three inches without penetrating the skin. He suffered considerable pain for several weeks afterward and incurred several hundred dollars of medical expenses.

(more)

Page 211 answers to questions submitted by the Milwaukee Police Department, dated May 22, 1967
Milwaukee, Wisconsin--53205--concerning act of heroism by Ralph Sacks of
Milwaukee, Wisconsin--act of heroism--Nov. 28, 1966--Milwaukee.

In addition to his medical expenses, Mr. Sacks suffered loss of several hundred dollars in income being incapacitated by his wounds from carrying on his business. On Monday, November 28, 1966, I was seated behind the counter in the store which I manage, Mary's Bookshop, located at 18 W. Juniper Avenue in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Sacks' wife, Frances, who is 25 years of age, and a daughter, Kaybelle, five years of age, both reside with him at 2741 N. Fredrick Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53206. When a young man walked in. He asked me if I were Mr. Blair. I said "Yes!". Thereupon he drew a revolver from his belt, the only eye-witness on the premises, and wounded Mr. Sacks. Mr. Blair, the manager of Mary's Bookshop, where the incident occurred, Mr. Fred Blair is 60 years of age and lives at 3236 N. 1st St., Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53206. I heard shouts and sounds of a struggle, and four shots fired in rapid succession. I was unable to see either of the two men. I seized a small toy baseball bat which was under the counter, and which I had received some time ago among some old books, and ran to the front of the store where I saw Mr. Sacks wrestling with the youth, holding on to the youth's gun hand with one hand and holding in his other hand the youth's neck. I was forced to clasp the assailant into submission, as he kept trying to shoot the gun, being foiled in this by Mr. Sacks' firm grasp on his right hand.

After the youth gave up, Mr. Sacks took possession of the gun and I held the youth quiet while Mr. Sacks went for the police. After the police arrived, for the first time Mr. Sacks realized he had been shot. Examination showed he had a shot once through the muscles of his right shoulder, and once through his right forearm. Fortunate, neither of the bullets hit a bone. Either a third bullet, or one of the two that hit him elsewhere, pierced his right abdomen, near his side and above the hip, for about three and a half inches.

The ordinary person would be either frozen at sight of the gun or run wide screaming for help. In either case, I would have been at the mercy of the assailant. He had ten 22-caliber bullets in a clip in his target revolver and could have pumped all of them into me at his leisure. From his behavior as he was being subdued it was clear that he would just as well have killed Mr. Sacks who was frustrating his intention of killing me. After he was subdued, he begged us to kill him, saying he wanted to commit suicide and did not have enough nerve to do it. He thought he "had to kill a Communist," and, I was one, he hoped to kill me.

The assailant was adjudged insane, suffering from Schizophrenia with persecutory delusions, and is now incarcerated.

Mr. Sacks saved my life at great risk to his own life. He is no relative of mine and had no particular reason for acting the way he did excepting that he wanted to thwart a murder. He is a veteran of military service, was a high school child, and has suffered considerable pain and financial loss as a result of his heroic action. I and my family are eternally grateful to him for his deed.

Yours, Fred B. Blair.

COPY--

Statement of FRED BLAIR, Manager Mary's Bookshop--318 W. Juneau Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin--53203--concerning act of heroism by Ralph Sacks of Milwaukee.

To Whom It May Concern:

On Monday, November 28, 1966, I was seated behind the counter in the store which I manage, Mary's Bookshop, located at 318 W. Juneau Avenue in Milwaukee, talking over a business transaction with Mr. Ralph Sacks, owner and manager of Ralph's Book Service,, and a dealer in rare books specializing in Americana. We had almost completed our transaction, when a young man walked in. He asked me if I were Mr. Blair. I said "Yes!". Thereupon he drew a revolver from his belt, or pocket inside his coat, and pointed it at me. Mr. Sacks cried: "He's got a gun!" and leaped at the youth, who stood about six feet from him, seizing his gun arm. I ducked behind the counter, and crawled out of the line of fire. On standing up I heard shouts and sounds of a struggle, and four shots fired in rapid succession. I was unable to see either of the two men. I seized a small toy baseball bat which lay under the counter, and which I had received previously among some old books, and ran to the front of the store where I saw Mr. Sacks wrestling with the youth, holding on to the youth's gun hand with one hand, and holding his other hand around the youth's neck. I was forced to club the assailant into submission, as he kept trying to shoot the gun, being foiled in this by Mr. Sacks' firm grasp on his right hand.

After the youth gave up, Mr. Sacks took possession of the gun and I held the youth quiet while Mr. Sacks went for the police. After the police arrived, for the first time Mr. Sacks realized he had been shot. Examination showed he had been shot once through the muscles of his right shoulder, and once through his right forearm. Fortunately, neither of the bullets hit a bone. Either a third bullet, or one of the two that hit him elsewhere, crossed his right abdomen, near his side and above the hip, for about three and a half inches.

The ordinary person would have either frozen at sight of the gun or run outside screaming for help. In either case, I would have been at the mercy of the assailant. He had ten 22-long caliber bullets in a clip in his target revolver and could have pumped all of them into me at his leisure. From his behavior as he was being subdued it was clear that he would just as well have killed Mr. Sacks who was frustrating his intention of killing me. After he was subdued, he begged us to kill him, saying he wanted to commit suicide and did not have enough nerve to do it. He thought he "had to kill a Communist," and, since I was one, he hoped to kill me.

The assailant was adjudged insane, suffering from Schizophrenia with paranoid delusions, and is now incarcerated.

Mr. Sacks saved my life at great risk to his own life. He is no relative of mine and had no particular reason for acting the way he did excepting that he wished to thwart a murder. He is a veteran of military service, with a wife and small child, and has suffered considerable pain and financial loss because of his heroic action. I and my family are eternally grateful to him for this unselfish deed.

Yours, Fred B. Blair.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
FRANK B. BLAIR
AUGUST 13, 1976
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN
BY CAROLINE K. MILLER
FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

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INTRODUCTION

Interviewee Background

Ered Bassett Blair was born in Berlin, Wisconsin on October 4, 1906, the seventh in a family of eleven. His family, of French-Canadian stock, has been connected with Wisconsin for over 150 years. He was baptized Roman Catholic and later was connected with the Congregational and Baptist churches. At present he is unaffiliated.

Fred Blair was educated in Wisconsin. He is a graduate of Wautoma High School, and attended the University of Wisconsin for two years in Dr. Meiklejohn's Experimental College, the second year as a Zona Gale Scholar.

He has worked on a sand farm, in the stone quarries, as a tannery worker, and in several factories. Mr. Blair has been a member of the International Longshoremen's Union, the United Furniture Workers, and the Paper, Pulp and Sulphite workers union. During the depression he was a member of the Unemployed Councils and the Workers Alliance.

Originally a Republican, Mr. Blair joined the Communist Party in 1929 and has been a member since. At present he is Wisconsin State Chairman of that party, and has been since 1938. Representing the Communist Party, Blair has run for Governor of Wisconsin, and Mayor of Milwaukee. He has also run for U.S. Senator and Congressman.

He is married and has one son. He had been manager of Mary's Bookshop in Milwaukee for thirteen years, until it closed in 1969.



FRED BISSETT BLAIR

University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland

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Oral History Program

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

You have been asked for information to be used in connection with the Oral History Program at the University of Maryland. The purpose of this program is to train and give experience to student interviewers and to gather and preserve information for historical, scholarly use.

A tape recording of your interview has been made by the interviewer. If funding is available, an original, verbatim typescript of the tape will be made and submitted to you for editing. A final retyped and edited transcript, together with the tape of the interview and the original verbatim typescript, if funding permits, will then be filed in the University library. These materials will be made available for purposes of research by qualified scholars, for use in college courses, for scholarly publications, and other related purposes.

* * * * *

I, FRED B. BLAIR, have read the above and,
(Interviewee, please print)
in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, I knowingly and voluntarily permit the University of Maryland the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all my rights of every kind whatsoever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, to the University of Maryland.

I hereby release and forever discharge the Board of Regents of the University of Maryland, its agents, servants and employees from any liability by virtue of any use in any form which may occur or be produced in the taking, copying, reproduction or processing of said information, and agree for myself, my heirs, legal representatives and assigns, to keep and save the Board of Regents of the University of Maryland, its agents, servants and employees, harmless from any and all claims therefore.

Fred B. Blair
(Interviewee (signature))

Nov. 23, 1976
Date

#1
Interview Number

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, CAROLINE K. EHLERS, in view of the
(Interviewer, please print)
historical and scholarly value of the information contained
in the interview with FRED B. BLAIR,
(Interviewee, please print)
knowingly and voluntarily permit the University of Maryland
the full use of this information, and hereby grant and assign
to the University of Maryland all rights of every kind whatever
pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are
now known, recognized or contemplated.

Caroline K. Ehlers
Interviewer (signature)

#1

Interview Number

2 December 1976

Date

TRANSCRIPT CONTENT AND

MINUTES BREAKDOWN

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Oral History Interview

with

Fred B. Blair

August 13, 1976

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

By Caroline K. Ehlers

for the University of Maryland

EHILERS What I would like you to discuss with me is how you view the impact of American involvement in Vietnam on our national tradition. Has there been, or do you think there will be, an impact on traditional American values? Has the Vietnam experience forced or facilitated any changes or re-evaluation of what we stand for, how we view ourselves? In short, what is your sense of how Vietnam influenced American feeling toward America and American values? I think perhaps it would be best to start with some brief background information on you, a sort of where you started and how, where you are now, how you got there, and then proceed from there. Would you tell me something about your background, your origins, and perhaps in what way your family background might have prepared you for or guided you into left wing politics?

BLAIR I was born in Berlin, Wisconsin. My parents were of French Canadian extraction. My father was a millwright in a tannery located near the house and all the members of the family went to work very early, the girls usually a little earlier than the boys. But the boys, the older generation --

the three older brothers -- started out when they were about fourteen. Some of them finished eighth grade and some didn't. I don't believe any of them went -- one might have gone a little bit to high school but the others didn't. They went right into shops or apprenticed. Two of them learned the machinist trade and one the ~~blacksmith~~ ^{blacksmithing} trade in the Soo Line shops at ~~Eondulac~~ ^{Fond du Lac}. Being French Canadian we ran into a certain amount of discrimination and approbrium from other nationalities. For instance, in Berlin, Wisconsin, we were considered to be Black, something I never found out until fifty years later, but which might have accounted for our family moving from Berlin to a larger center. My mother had been born within a few miles of Berlin and my father was born in Minnesota. They met up in Minnesota in a lumber camp where my mother worked as a cook and my father worked as a lumberjack. The first four or five members of the family were born up in Minnesota. We were Roman Catholic, baptized Roman Catholic until the family changed, but the -- well for instance going back to the example of the kind of discrimination, my older brother was hit in the head with a stone by Polish kids. The Polish kids would pick on the French kids, and vice versa, and as a result everybody in the family had to fight from an early age because of these squabbles between the different nationalities. The Irish and the French would generally gang up on the Polish -- the Polish were later arrivals on the scene.

All my older brothers, my two older brothers, became renowned for their ability to fight. They were always playing all kinds of tricks. This went back to the previous generation when my grand uncles and my uncle, Fred Bassett, also had gotten tangled in these fights with the Polish people in the area. So the result was that there was a feeling among the people of French Canadian background that people of other national origins are -- rather have sort of come in and taken over what they felt was their first stamping ground. The French Canadians and the Indians, especially the Ojibways, were on very good relations with one another, intermarrying, and the Ojibways, most of them, were Catholic as were the French Canadians. They had been accustomed for a long time -- the tradition still remained when I was small -- to consider the border between Canada and the United States sort of a presumption, something that didn't belong there. They considered themselves to be equally citizens of Canada and of the United States. They would just move back and forth over the border as they saw fit, as the fur trade took them, or as hunting, or as just looking for work, took them. Most of the French Canadians whose families came from Canada like my family originally, back around the 1830's -- though some of them had been there much earlier -- considered themselves -- they didn't consider themselves to be second generation Americans or anything like that. They considered that their American roots went way back including Canada and

the United States. It was a peculiar situation but you have a feeling of rejection, a feeling of being an outcast. I would say that it was an experience of coming from a working class family which went way back. When I say working class it was not only in the factories and in the woods and in places like that but also included some farm background. People who were accustomed to work for a living absorbed the idea that this is the proper way for people to live, to do some useful labor, respect for labor, and also a strong class feeling. My grandfather, for instance, told me, always used to say that some day there is going to be the biggest war of all and that's going to be between the poor and the rich and that's going to be the bloodiest war of them all. And some of our family were in the Civil War, and that was probably the bloodiest war that had taken place on a mass scale in the history of the world since the Napoleonic conflicts. It was the first--[Friedrich] Engels characterized the Civil War as the first really mass war in history. The first war on a basis of the new productive system of capitalism. The Napoleonic wars were fought a great deal with mercenaries, but here is one where an entire people are involved, both a north and south before the thing is finished, and made a profound effect on everybody. But the idea of a class struggle, a class war is absorbed you might say with your mother's milk in working class families. My father had been a member of the Knights of Labor and had been a member of many unions,

but had no faith in labor unions because always somebody would run off with the treasury and they would be left holding the bag. But the idea of the working class was there. Then like most people in Wisconsin they were Republicans, our family were. Republicans based upon the idea that the Republican party represented in the beginning the abolition of slavery and the Homestead Act, you know, free land for people, and not the idea of Republicanism that came in later once the big monopolies were set up in this country and took over the Republican Party, the idea that the Republican Party being a party of privilege, a party of the privileged class. It was the Republican Party, was the outlet for the wishes of the common people. This is true among Black people, it is also true among working people to a great deal. They were sold on the idea that free trade which the Democrats stood for would bring in foreign competition and jeopardize their jobs and like that. So you have some of this kind of background. Then there is also a strong anti-war feeling which is common to people of French Canadian background, but which they share with a lot of the other people in Wisconsin. The people of Scandinavian origin, the people of German origin, the people of many countries in Europe who came to the United States to escape compulsory military service and had an abhorrence of war. I would say your basic idea in addition to the class feeling was the opposition to war. The French Canadians were against war because they were always asked to

fight wars for the English and they didn't see any sense in fighting for a foreign ruler. But these other people, it took their European experience and their abhorrence of militarism and the war and. . . When my oldest brother died in the First World War this made a terrific impact upon every member of the family. The idea arose that there's got to be some way to abolish war. Of course there's another common thing to people who grow up in working class and farming families, and that's the idea you have to better yourself. My father was always after me to study to be a lawyer. He was sort of torn. On the one hand he would advise there's no sense learning a trade because the techniques are changing so fast that every trade is made obsolete in a few years and so you're back into the manual labor class once more after you've spent years learning a trade. He thought one should get some education, that was the way to get on in the world. As I say, this is common. It's also common among Black people and children of foreign born people, the notion that the way to get ahead is go get education and get into a profession. They always hope that their children would have it better than they did, and that, the way it seemed to be to go into a profession, to become a member of the middle class, so called. So those pressures are on you. Yet on the other hand my father would like to have seen me stay on the farm -- we had gone to the farm by that time up at Washara County -- and help out on the farm. So my mother was the one

who put on the pressure to complete my education. I stayed a year out of high school to help on the farm, but she insisted I go on and finish high school. Then I thought that I would go to college, and of course in the good old American way as you're taught by your Horatio Alger books you save your money and you get ahead. I saved my money and I didn't spend anything that I absolutely didn't have to because I wanted to get an education. After four years I had accumulated enough to take me through a year in a university with the help of a few women particularly that we had run into, either I or my sisters or somebody had run into, I was able to get a scholarship, a Zona Gale scholarship, to the University of Wisconsin. One of the women was Elizabeth Waters, after whom a hall was named on the University. She was a regent of the University system. Another woman was Zona Gale who was a writer. She endowed this scholarship, but she was also connected on the Board of Regents. And a third woman was a member of the Board of Control of the public institutions in the State. Her name was Nina Grimm. I met her when I was working out in a state sanitarium west of here in Waukesha County, back in around 1927. These three women made it possible for me to get this Zona Gale scholarship, and I had it for two years at the University of Wisconsin. I found out very -- the first year in the University was very rewarding because all you had to do was study and I love to do nothing better than studying.

Then I went back to work to get some money. I spent all my money because I didn't want to have to work while I was going to school. I spent all my money, and I had to get some more, and I borrowed from the University. During the summer I had paid back that loan but I started with very little. The second year I got disillusioned with school, with the University, with the professions, with everything. It's the kind of thing that became very common in the sixties. I notice many of the younger generation were, including our son Bill. The first year was just finding a new world, meeting new people from other classes that you didn't meet before, or different nationalities and so on. And the excitement of the ideas. But then the second year it comes as a kind of an anti-climax, and it becomes a rather critical year. The second year I got completely turned off and disillusioned with the educational apparatus. Well, for one thing I began to find out that if you want to be a teacher you have to kow tow to forces that have nothing to do with the intellect, all kinds of industrial, banking forces, and petty politics played in the universities for advancement, and the like of that. As far as being a lawyer is concerned, Dr. Clarence Sharp, who was in the Experimental College, told me I wasn't fit to be a lawyer. And during that second year I began to develop an acquaintance with Marxist ideas through some students who were at the University and began to question all the things that I had accepted. I take it for granted that democracy was the only

system of government. But then studying ancient Greece and finding the origins of democracy, and then beginning to realize that there can be different kinds of democracy, I finally read [Nicolai] Lenin's State and the Revolution after the second year and became aware of the fact that democracy means different things to different classes. There can be a democracy in a slave society, but it only applies to the slave owners. There can be democracy in a feudal society if the quality of the landowners and the people in that class of society. . . Democracy in our country only applies to those that have the reins of power, and of course there's gradations in there. Actually democracy was a dictatorship over the people. Well these were the ideas as they formulated themselves. I wasn't convinced that communism was the proper idea -- you must remember that anybody who grew up in Wisconsin in the last -- in the first -- I would say the last twenty years of the last century and the first thirty years of this century -- was growing up in a place where the Socialist Party had officials not only in Milwaukee but in Manitowish and Beaver Dam and in Wausau. There was strong Socialist tradition. Also the Progressive Party, the LaFollette movement, had big effects. My father was very much a Republican. He always voted loyally for the Republican Party and though he admired Theodore Roosevelt very much he never forgave him for bolting the Republican Party in 1912 and enabling the Democrats and [Woodrow] Wilson to get in. My brothers leaned in the direction of the

Socialist Party. The process of coming to the final conclusion that I would become a Communist meant you had to criticize all the ideas that you had absorbed. Religion didn't bother me because my folks left the Catholic Church when I was about -- I was the last one baptized I think in the Catholic Church. They left and drift around, joined the Congregational Church and the younger ones were baptized in the Congregational Church. So that there was this criticism of religion, this feeling, and I just could never get any religion into my system. You had to go into this whole criticism of the American tradition in the process of going to school and arguing with people, and it soon became clear that there are two traditions in the United States. There's a tradition of the people and the tradition of the elite, of the power, the people in power. It was quite a shock to me to find there were still people defending Alexander Hamilton's concept of government when I was going to college. Of course that has blossomed into the John Birch Society and a lot of other things. Very very right wing conservative notions. They base themselves on things like that. I had taken it for granted that the American tradition was the tradition of revolution, the tradition of freedom, the tradition of equality, and all these things began to unwind. Then of course there's a feeling of disillusionment that comes in. In this, I had been thinking of joining the Socialist Party which was a big jump for anyone in our family, raised as Republicans. But I

got disgusted with the Socialists when I saw that their rule in Milwaukee was hardly distinguishable from the rule of Republicans or Democrats in some other cities of the country on many essential matters. The final thing was in the case of Tom Mooney. This was way back in the twenties, late twenties. I belonged to a liberal club and we were trying to pass a resolution for the freedom of Tom Mooney, and the Socialists opposed that. They fought against it. I got disgusted with them. And then the Progressives were very much taken up with Phil LaFollette -- I didn't meet his brother but I met Phil LaFollette -- and he put forward the philosophy of the Progressive Party, that is, that all income should be limited to a maximum of \$25,000, and all property to a maximum of 50,000 bucks. But it doesn't take much thinking to realize that you can't go back to a myth, a form of society which in actuality never existed in this country. For this was the Jeffersonian ideal, that you're in a situation in which you have huge monopolies, huge trusts, and you have a centralization of things, and you just can't break that up and go back to something earlier. What you have to have is a step that begins to curb these big outfits and take them over. The process of growth is a process of criticism, a rejection of ideas that you once held very dear. In the course of which you have to have an explanation of these things, and I found it in Marxism. The only one thing that prevented me from . . . I was being called a Communist by that time. There were

professors that I admired very much, when they came to such simple questions as an increase in pay for working people they would take a very very strong reactionary stand. In a philosophy class, for one, Clarence ^{Ayres} ~~Ayres~~ was one of my professors and he started squawking about the barbers raising the price of a haircut from 25¢ to 35¢. I said the barbers gotta live too and he said well that's the trouble with you Communists, he says all you ever think about is the working man, you never think about the consumer. And that was a shock to me. I never thought of myself as being a Communist. I just sided with the people that had to work for a living. That made me think maybe I am getting to be a little bit of a Communist. Then the Socialists called me a Communist because I was in favor of freedom for Tom Mooney. Then we had big free speech fights. We brought Dora Russell there who believed in women's equality and was living with Bertrand Russell and wasn't married to him. We brought her on the campus and they tried to expel all of us who had anything to do with bringing her there. Then all of a sudden you began to see that people you had worshipped as liberals were just caving in, they just had no guts whatever on a fight like that. This wasn't such a terrible thing, but its an education to you, to go through an experience like that. Then also there was a young fellow named David Gordon that was sentenced to three years in a reform school for writing a poem that appeared in the Daily Worker. In this poem there was a passage that said America

is the "whorehouse on the sidewalks of the world." They put that down as pornography and gave him three years in jail, and they tried to close up the paper for printing it. We had a big movement, a free speech movement there, and in the course of a thing like that you see what everybody's position is. They get up there and they argue and they fight for it. We had a meeting of about 800 people there. Lo and behold Dave Gordon got out as a result of this thing, and he came and he turned out to be my roommate in the University. He was a Zona Gale scholar too. He had a big influence on me. I disliked him personally. We argued over every question and it helped a great deal. The final thing that convinced me that maybe I should join the Communist Party was I felt they had the right philosophy. In the 1928 elections our Experimental College examined the programs of all the political parties. I was for [Herbert] Hoover then. By examining the programs I became convinced that the program of William Z. Foster made more sense to me than that of Norman Thomas or Hoover or the Democrats, of Al Smith. So I served on the Foster for President Committee as a secretary without any knowledge, but just because I liked the program. However when I got to the polls I'm afraid I backslid and I voted for Al Smith. Though I was anti-Catholic, I hated -- I wouldn't say I was anti-Catholic, but well I had a good deal of anti-Catholicism in me -- but I just thought it was unfair for them to bring his religion up as a reason you couldn't be president, so I voted

for him instead of for Foster, but I campaigned for Foster. All of these things laid the foundation, but I still thought Communism was a utopian scheme. It would never work, and you could never convince the American working people of such a thing. Then I came here to Milwaukee. I was intending to go back to school in 1929. I worked on the railroad and while I was there I started reading works of Marx. I read the Digest of Capital by [Karl] Marx's daughter, by Eleanor ^{Aveling} ~~Avalene~~, called The People's Marx. I read Lenin's State and the Revolution and Lenin's Imperialism, and still I wasn't convinced. Then my sister joined the Young Communist League. She had gone to the University. She had got a scholarship from the Association of University Women through Elizabeth Waters, the woman I mentioned before. She met Dave Gordon and his wife there, she roomed with them, and then she joined the Young Communist League. That gave me a jar because she was much younger than I. My brother was working at ^{Harnischfegers} ~~Harnesveggers~~ and the Communist Party had a small club there. They put out a shop paper and I knew a lot of people there. When I saw the reaction of the people to the ideas in that shop paper I was convinced that the workers will react, will accept this kind of program. Then I joined up, and that was in 1929, I've been a member since, that's forty seven years. I've been in the leadership in the party all this time in the State of Wisconsin. I've been the State Chairman now for thirty eight years, since 1938. That's so far as the background goes. Since the members

of our family -- naturally as we went different ways. . . I might say one of the big things that I was convinced is that there's no way out for an individual. Of course you got to bear in mind that's the time we had just come out of the first World War. We had a period of unprecedented prosperity in the country and the students were beginning to question the standards that were put before them, that is, two cars in every garage and a chicken in every pot. They were beginning to say, isn't there something more to Americanism than just the worship of material values? You will recall there was a movement of young people to desert the country. There was a movement of people who went to Europe, [Ernest] Hemingway and Thornton Wilder, a whole group of people, expatriates who lived for a number of years in Paris. There was also a fear of war and when I was a student we were always talking about where we could go to hide if another war came. The interesting thing was that we picked out some islands in the South Pacific where the war would never get there, and that's where your father was stationed in the Second World War, you know. We just didn't understand the forces at work, the struggle for markets in between these huge conglomerate outfits and their control of governments, and how the whole world was now one pie and not just divided up into segments anymore. But see these things enter in, and then on top of all of this, just when I'm going back to work a little bit and get enough money to go to school, then the great depression comes and that was the most shocking

thing for the people in the United States and involved every family because here we had a perspective of unlimited prosperity going on forever and the bottom fell out. You know what happened with your own family. One day your grandfather was running three banks and a couple months later the sheriff was at the door every morning. In fact he was at the door so much that they always had a place for him at the table when he came to serve more writs. You heard that didn't you? Here Mary [Keith Blair] had been going to school, and she had charge accounts on Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue in New York, and she'd go down there, she just -- things were fairly easy. They weren't rich people, but they were fairly easy. Then she comes home, 1931, after having graduated and if her father hadn't put everything, the house, in his mother's name, your grandmother's name, they would have been on welfare. As it was, your grandmother started baking bread and selling it so that they could keep going and then took in roomers. Mary had to learn to cook, had to clean up the house and everything else, and finally she got her job.

delete

This was a big come down. Now that's how things happened with her side of the family. She was the only one that came to communism. The others still have mixtures of conservative and liberal ideas as a result

of all the things that have happened since that time, the gradual pick up of production, the gradual reestablishment of a position not as high as it had been, but a certain amount of comfort. But Mary, she was going to the University of Chicago, and she met some people there. She was leaning in that direction. In 1938 she joined up the Communist Party. She didn't really get any connection until 1942 because she was moving around all the time. But this is how people came to the ideas. The feeling that you can't do it by yourself and that if you do go ahead and make a lot of money, and reach a certain amount of success in society and all your own -- if you have a strong family consciousness and family feeling and you have a strong feeling of oneness with other people who work for a living, you feel you're a traitor if you go ahead and go out by yourself and leave everybody else down. You feel the only way is people have to unite together and go up together. That was a basic idea I think that led to this. Now so you can see the elements of a feeling of class loyalty, a feeling of opposition to the war, opposition to the rule of the rich people and the feeling you can never reconcile these two things.

BEGIN SIDE B TAPE I

EHLERS [Let me try to fill in some] specific details. What year were you born?

BLAIR October 4, 1906.

EHLERS 1906.

BLAIR Yes.

EHLERS And you said you moved from Berlin to a larger community.

BLAIR ^{Fond du Lac}
Fondulac, Wisconsin.

EHLERS Oh, it was ^{Fond du Lac}
Fondulac. And what year did you start college?

BLAIR In 1927. I think it was the fall of 1927 -- 1927 to 1928, 1928 to 192... Yes I left there in the June of 1929, yes, the fall of 1927.

EHLERS Okay.

BLAIR Two years.

EHLERS I'd like now to proceed to some sort of a general and brief discussion of American values, American traditions. In very broad terms, how would you describe our national values, those deep feelings that are not written but are sensed from within. You know, what's your perception, what do you see to be traditional American values?

BLAIR In order to answer that I think I would have to say that there are two sets of values that are American values. The one set of values of the ruling stratum of society who have been well described by C. Wright Mills in The Power Elite. ^{He}
~~She~~ speaks about white Anglo Saxon Protestant elite, you know, intermarrying with one another and keeping everything in their hands. It's a bit oversimplified and its not a class approach.

But the ideas that -- I would say that the country was conceived in a dichotomy, a split between approaches. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights represented a struggle between different concepts, different approaches. The propertied classes had one idea of the kind of a country that they wanted and the kind of a government they wanted. The unpropertied people had a different approach. Insofar as they began to accept the idea, began to accept the concept of race, the compromise that was achieved was at the expense pretty much of the Indians and the black slaves in this country. And later on when half of Mexico was taken away and attached to the United States, then of course at the expense of the Mexican American people. There has been this -- the values of the wealthy people are entirely different than the values of the poor, of the dispossessed people in this country. Therefore the American tradition on the one hand is a tradition of struggle, a tradition of unity, a tradition of equality, respect for one another, and its a tradition of struggle against being oppressed, of being robbed. On the other hand its a tradition of the ruling class which is of just walking all over everybody, and just dog eat dog and the devil take the hindmost, and respecting wealth more than anything else. So when you speak of the American tradition you have to bear in mind the continual split in the country between the people and those who ruled over them from the very foundation. That goes back to beforehand. In other words

the values are the values of the various classes that are contending within the country for their own interests and they have different interests. [Abraham] Lincoln expressed it very well in many of the expressions. He said that if some people were born to rule and others to be ruled, he said some people would be born with saddles on their backs and others with boots in order to ride them. He was refuting that thing. And Lincoln also expressed it when he said that labor is prior to and superior to capital. He expressed the concept of the working people of all nations have much in common. That's why Marx addressed his famous letter to Lincoln during the Civil War and Lincoln answered him. So along these lines. Now the tradition I'm interested in is the tradition of the slaves fighting for their freedom, the Indians fighting for their existence, against the genocide, fighting for land, of people fighting for decency, and fighting for an improvement of their lot. That's the thing. I think Angela Davis expressed it very well in Appleton [Wisconsin], speaking about the Bicentennial. She was speaking on the Bicentennial up there. She said that the only way to celebrate the Bicentennial was to carry through a new revolution in this country. A revolution that would abolish the continuing enslavement of people of different colors and the continual grinding down of the working people at the expense of the wealthy. You better stop me when I get going too long. That's the views. Now when you speak of the American tradition there's

a tradition of conquest, but there's a tradition of resistance to conquest, conquest of other peoples. There's a tradition of throwing off the rule of the British crown. But right away you had Aaron Burr with his conspiracy to begin to annex other parts of Latin America. You had people like [Thomas] Jefferson who believed in democracy and yet owned slaves, and lived with Black women and had children by them who in turn were his slaves. [George] Washington was a slave owner. So here you have on the one hand they were fighting for freedom and independence of the colonies, and on the other hand they were carrying this through. You have Ben Franklin who was opposed to slavery, and yet for the sake of keeping the Union together refused to push the resolution that came out of Pennsylvania to abolish slavery. Because he didn't want to lose the votes of the South. You see you have compromise and you have conquest, and here you have the tradition of Abraham Lincoln who fought against the Mexican War. Yet on the other side of that is the tradition that wrested Texas away from Mexico and then fought this war and took half of Mexico's territory away. Lincoln was defeated in Congress for opposing that, and was out of politics for several years on account of that. So you see it goes all the way through. You have the tradition of the Underground Railroad, the tradition of white people fighting against slavery, the tradition of unions all voting in mass to join the Union Army in order to abolish slavery.

EHLERS So you see sort of a tradition of struggle.

BLAIR A tradition of struggle on the part of the people and a tradition of use of force to keep the people down here and to conquer other peoples for sake of their resources on the part of the ruling class. And a tradition of treason in-between. People who are betraying the people and selling out to the upper ones, or people who even betray the interests of the country for their own private interests.

EHLERS Do you want to leave it at that or summarize?

BLAIR Well I thought maybe when you ask about

EHLERS Vietnam

BLAIR What the impact of Vietnam on American tradition.

EHLERS Okay. Well then lets do get to the core of the issue, Vietnam and its effect on this nation. Do you remember -- lets see, I have a few questions here. Do you remember when you first became aware of Vietnam as an issue?

BLAIR I think it -- its hard to tell because as the overpowering issue that it finally became -- I think it was around 1954 when the French were driven out of Vietnam. It looked as if they were going to achieve their independence. Then the United States intervention began. It escalated, it got bigger and bigger under different, under all the different presidents, until it became the overpowering issue. From the beginning we were opposed to any American intervention in Vietnam. Those people had been fighting for 2000 years for their independence against the Chinese, and the Japanese had overrun them, and the Axis had overrun them in the Second World War. The French had come in there over a hundred years before and made them a

colony, split them up, and robbed the country. In French novels there is always a character in there who comes back from what they called Annam, or Cochin China, or Indochina, comes back and opens a big palace in Paris with all the money he got out of there.

EHRLERS Your attitude, then, was to oppose the -- any Western involvement in Vietnam, from the very beginning.

BLAIR Yes, United States involvement. The French had been driven out. Then the United States went in and tried to reverse that. The reasons for it were made obvious by [Dwight D.] Eisenhower himself when he spoke of the tungsten, the gold, the rubber and the oil in Vietnam. It was clear that the corporations wanted to get in there. Even our local corporations like Allis Chalmers were building plants down there during the war and were involved in that whole thing. From the point of view of the working class you see if Allis Chalmers is beginning to move operations to Vietnam and paying the people 35¢ a day what is going to happen to the jobs here.

EHRLERS Then what is your sense of how Vietnam affected the American people's feelings toward America and American values? Will there be, or has there already been, any impact on traditional American values? And do you think the experience will result in major changes in what we stand for, how we view ourselves as a nation?

BLAIR There are several ideas involved there, and the answer is a big yes as far as developments go in the future. For one thing, beginning with Korea -- the defeat of the American armies

in Korea, and the compromise that they eventually had to work out, which was an unjust compromise because the United States should have gotten out of the whole of the country and not retained the south and kept the dictator in the south. The effect of that was to shake the feeling that the United States was invincible, had never lost a war. Everybody used to tell you that proudly. We never lost a war, the American fighting man can lick anybody, and so on. That shook it. But that myth was really smashed in Vietnam. Because the United States suffered a major defeat not only in a military sense, but in a diplomatic sense, and in the political sense. As far as the people are concerned, the American people, including myself, including all of the Communists, had great pride in the progressive traditions of the United States. At the same time you have great opposition to the reactionary traditions in the country. Yet the American people, it was always possible to rally them under the cry our country is in danger. Then combine this with the chauvinist feeling that we've never been licked, and you've got something, a situation where people will join in a war just out of general patriotism, feeling that the country is endangered and you gonna be helping. You couldn't convince people that anything that was happening 12,000 miles from our coast affected us immediately. I think it cleared up a lot of people's minds and made something visible to them that had only been visible to just a small number of people before, and that is that this was an

adventure of the big corporations to get the oil, get the natural resources, and they didn't care how much of the taxpayers money and how much of the blood of the people they spent. In order to get ahold of that property and exploit that part of the world as -- the grand strategy was to open up the whole Asiatic continent, would open up China, India, Burma, and Singapore and all the rest, you know, the Malay Peninsula. It would open the whole thing to the penetration of U. S. capital. That was the grand strategy. But even the limited strategy, from their point of view after all, they weren't losing any lives there. It was only working people, Black people, native Americans and Chicanos that were being burned up into that furnace down there. If they got it, it was billions upon billions of dollars of profits in oil and all these other things there. They developed this insane notion that they had to destroy the country in order to save it, destroy a village in order to save it, kill people for the good of the people.

EHLERS And how did this....

BLAIR And this affected the American people because to them it was a senseless thing and it was not their war. That clipping -- the way that we saw it, the way I saw it, it was a rich man's war and a poor man's fight. Now that's something that is traditional among common people in the United States, a rich man's war and a poor man's fight. The First World War -- there was a lot of resistance to it in this country from the hatred people had of militarism. They disliked the draft, and

they weren't Germans. Of course, many of the German-Americans and then the Irish-Americans who hated the British and didn't want to go in on the side of the British. Just generally people were opposed to the First World War. But a lot of people rallied to that cause by the idea that it was a war to save democracy, that it was a war for self-determination of small nations. These catch words won a lot of support, and there is a certain amount of substance to some of them too. But it became clear, the First World War, it became clear to people in all kinds of countries, including the United States, that it was an imperialist war, a war for redividing the world. The second World War was a different story. Here you had the danger of fascism, never mind that without the manipulations of the Rockefellers and the Morgans and their presidents we wouldn't have had to have a Second World War. [Adolf] Hitler could have been stopped in his tracks in Spain. [Benito] Mussolini could have been stopped in Ethiopia. Concessions were made to these dictatorial, these fascist regimes, because they hoped they could turn them against the Soviet Union, against the first country of socialism. They could abolish the danger of socialism.

EHLERS And in Vietnam?

BLAIR And in Vietnam, here of course it was just money. That was it. They were aiming at the Soviet Union, they were aiming at China and the Soviet Union, with this as a jumping off point. There were huge profits that could be realized in the course of the war.

EHLERS And. . . .

BLAIR The people began to get this clear in their minds, that what the hell are we fighting for. That's why for the first time -- it began in Korea, disillusionment on the part of the soldiery. But in Vietnam if you combine the danger that the soldiers were under, the stubbornness of the defense of the country by the people, the general unity of the people. They had their traitors there, they had their Diems and they had these other guys, and the United States tried to subsidize, in fact they had a million and a half so-called South Vietnamese that were under arms and were being used against the resistance within the country. But here the demoralization was so great that a mutiny began to develop among the armed forces. And it had its reflection back home. The resistance to this, to the draft, and the resistance to going in to being involved in this war was something this country had never seen before. They had seen small samples of it. There was resistance in the first World War by socialists, and anarchists, IWW [^{Industrial} International Workers of the World] , sections of the labor movement, and different nationality groups. But here the movement became a majority movement. The Communists were the first to say that we have no business there, we should get out of there. We were first to raise the slogan get out of Vietnam, leave the Vietnamese determine their own destinies. In opposition we had the domino theory: if that falls then the whole nation's going to fall. As if its any of our business if the people want Communism or some other regime

there. People began to look at their government and look to see the forces at work within it, how its being dominated by people who don't give a darn for the masses of the people within the country. And the great disillusionment. Then when an army loses its morale, it can't win no matter how big it is. All through history you have things like that. You have Xerxes going against the Greeks with a tremendous army of people and have them completely dispersed and destroyed because there wasn't any morale in the army. The United States Army lost its morale. Not so much among the pilots who weren't down there in the dirt. All they had to do was drop bombs and watch things blow up in the air. But among the rank and file soldiers and even the officers, then you had something develop on a mass scale and hadn't developed before. There was mutiny in the United States Army that was occupying Russia after the first World War. That's why the American troops had to be withdrawn, around Archangel, and over in Siberia. There was mutiny there, but this was. . . There was mutiny of Black soldiers against the treatment that they were receiving. There was defection in the Civil War among small farmers who lived up in the hills and even seceded from the Confederate States to form their own states, and things of that sort took place.

EHLERS But Vietnam was a bigger mutiny?

BLAIR This was a mutiny involving practically all the armed forces and the civilian forces back home as well.

EHLERS So then you would see some sort of impact on the military institutions, the military structure.

BLAIR Yes. That's right, a tremendous impact upon it. The American ruling class can no longer levy a really popular army. They have to have a mercenary army now. A mercenary army can be very deadly and very bloody, but if the people get turned off against it can -- then they'll go to help. But you see, a military defeat such as they suffered there is bound to shake the prestige of anybody who leads you into such a defeat. And it was just one defeat after another. There were victories. Victories! You killed, wiped out villages, you killed thousands of people, you put a million people in prisons, you had tiger cages, and all this kind of stuff. Then there's a new technological factor, and that's television and the competition between them and the newspapers. People saw the things that were going on. There was a revolution against it. I would say that it has smashed the idea that the United States forces are invincible. It has shown that it's possible for American military forces to be defeated. It's shown that all the amount of money in the world cannot win if the cause is wrong. It shows that you can't depend on an army unless the army has morale. The leadership of this army in Vietnam contributed to the loss of morale by the corruption that went on in Vietnam, and by the spread of dope among the population. Incidentally one of the heritages of the U.S. army in Vietnam is 500,000 ex-prostitutes, most of them suffering from venereal disease. On account of the

United States blockade you can't even get drugs to treat the people, penicillin and other things to treat them. Mass poverty, deprivation, misery, this is. . . As far as the United States imperialism is concerned their name is mud all over the world. Not only did they get beat there, but they can see what they gave to those countries down there. They gave them nothing but misery and murder and destruction, defoliation of huge areas of land, deformed children growing as a result of all this stuff, napalm. The United States suffered a great diplomatic defeat. The idea of the United States as a bearer of democracy and liberty has completely disappeared in the minds of people throughout most of the world.

EHLERS And here at home possibly?

BLAIR And here at home also. Its . . .

EHLERS A furthering of the disillusionment and . . .

BLAIR Yeah. Disillusionment, disenchantment, and disgust you might say. There's still the main motive forces, of course, of most people is their own self interest. That will make people accept things that are absolutely morally wrong, accept them because after all I benefit by it.

EHLERS Do you think, then, that Americans will reassess what their priorities are? That Vietnam will have that type of an effect?

BLAIR I think it already has. When we can have a mayor like Mayor Henry ^{Mayor} Meyer in Milwaukee just going around all over and saying we gotta reorder our priorities, we gotta stop

spending money for so-called defense, and divert it to the cities, it's a beginning. It's a sign that it's already a mass feeling among people that our priorities are wrong. All the national priorities are wrong. And there's a general lack of faith in leadership in the country. That has a bad effect somewhat, the sort of feeling that it doesn't matter who gets in, they're all a bunch of crooks. It has a demoralizing effect. That's going to be a temporary thing because people will find that there is leadership but it has to come out of their own ranks. It has to be based on their own interests and not on a so-called common interest that they have with Wall Street, the common interest with the so-called free enterprise system. I think its shaken this country up more than anything in the country's history. It has led to more division and more awareness of things. The problem that's coming now is that the same process is going on wherever they think there's wealth. Wherever they think they can build up something against the Soviet Union, against the socialist world, money is being poured by the billions. Ten billion dollars into Iran for example. Sixty thousand American advisors there. You can see the new Vietnam accumulating there and people see that process.

EHLERS

Do you think because of Vietnam people will make more of an effort to -- well, in their re-evaluation of political institutions, to try and assert pressure on their political leaders?

BLAIR I think that'll be the outcome of it. I think everything is in a kind of a formless -- sort of like a formless state at the present time.

EHLERS Limbo.

BLAIR Yeah. Sort of that way. But the new forces are gathering. New political forces are accumulating within this country. New approaches are accumulating. But they are just barely forming. If you're studying, if you want to understand politics, anybody wants to understand social developments, you learn very quickly that the things that are new and seem to be very weak are the ones that eventually may determine the whole direction later on. That's what you have to pay attention to. The American system looks very strong, the capitalist system looks very strong. The wealth is tremendous. But there is such tremendous waste, there is such tremendous deterioration in the living quality in the United States. We've almost reached the point of no return for many of our vast lakes, and the others are going the same way. Our water supplies, our energy problems, and more and more people see that this is tied up with the profit system. It's impossible to reorganize things for the benefit of the people without attacking the profit system. So far profits are sacred, everything is subordinate to that. But people are beginning to say why do we have to have profit? You can't even run a bus line on a profit basis, you got to run it on a socialized basis. They try to limit it, try to make profit out of it. You can't run a post office, can't deliver the

mail on a profit basis. You can't have medicine on a profit basis. Some people get rich and the rest of the people have inadequate care. You can't even run a school system on the way we're doing it, if they figure that somebody's got to make money building new buildings and selling new gadgetry and books to the school system. The quality of everything is under scrutiny now.

EHLERS Let me turn my tape over.

BEGIN SIDE A TAPE II

EHLERS Then you see a change in some of our social institutions, social structure, or at least society's priorities?

BLAIR Yes, society's priorities definitely. Profits has to be put into the background and public interest, interest in the people, has to come to the foreground. I think that's the thing people are getting wise to. Also there has to be a leadership that represents the interest of the people, and not the interests of a small profit making class. Now this is -- people are getting more and more aware of things like that. Beginning to feel. . . But it's still a small, limited grouping. Take the labor movement, for instance. Your fellows like [Frank] Fitzsimmons in the Teamsters Union with his tremendous salary which corresponds to an executive of a huge corporation. The Teamsters still accept that as a necessity in order that they can get the wages that they get. Therefore they consider any criticism of Fitzsimmons coming from outside to be anti-union criticism, to be coming from the employers, not to their best interest. When it starts to come from

within their own ranks, with all the difficulties -- the gangster control, the danger of being murdered if you express yourself -- then when it comes from that and begins to gather steam, there'll be a complete change in the kind of leadership that they're accepting. Our contention is that you need a class struggle leadership, not a class collaboration leadership in these labor unions. That's the direction that Communists are working for. That's a very small minority movement. But there are great numbers of non-Communists who are willing to unite with Communists in order to make a change for a class struggle leadership. That is, a leadership that has a policy of fighting for the interests of the workers, and not of getting themselves into big well paid jobs and exchanging cigars with employers as the main thing in life. But rather the struggle for the interests of their membership. In this growing developing movement a big role, one of the leading roles, is being played by Black working people, men and women. Also the women's movement is playing a big role in the Renaissance of the labor movement, and so are the youths.

EHLERS How did Vietnam affect that?

BLAIR Well, while the Vietnamese war was going on there was a tendency in the ranks of many workers to feel that the war may be unjust, the war may be bad, and it may even be harmful to the future of our country, but meanwhile we're working, we're getting good pay, and that keeps us out of the army. So there was the selfish feeling of what's good for me -- well

after all I got to look out for number one -- that selfish feeling prevailed to a large extent and that enabled the misleadership of labor to tie them somewhat, a little bit, to the war. But on the other hand these working class families saw the members of their families go to Vietnam and get killed, come back in fragments, or wounded, and what was worse, to see their own minds destroyed by drugs and by the terrible crimes that they were forced to commit when they were over there. And we're still having the effects of that in the wave of crime in the country, and the types of crime that are going on in which Vietnamese veterans have been involved often. They just go berserk, they have no control over themselves. They were under such strain, they saw such horrors, they have a sense of guilt at the murders and the rapes that they committed, the looting, the like of that you see, and filled up on drugs. You have cases where guys just go berserk, they kill their wives, kill their families, they start sniping at people on the streets. You know they feel the Viet Cong is everywhere. They gotta defend themselves against them. It's a Vietnam syndrome, the veterans call it.

EHLERS Do you think, then, Vietnam has created to our social problems in that regard?

BLAIR Oh, yeah, added immensely to our social problems. Of course the worst way its added is the feeling that its perfectly legitimate to just waste taxpayers money. That the military budget is sacred -- one hundred and four billion dollar military budget. It's justified that we gotta keep up with

the Soviet Union, or they're going to overrun us, it's justified by this red baiting thing. I would say that anti-Communism got an awful licking in the course of this war too. The people began to say, what if they want a Communist government? They have a right to have what kind of a government they want. We don't want anyone dictating our government. People began to suspect that this whole anti-Communist foreign policy, there's something wrong with it. Especially when they see them backing up -- overthrowing the Chilean democratically elected government. They see them supporting dictators all over the world. They see their -- I would say that the newest thing in succession to Vietnam is what happened in Africa and Angola. This was an eye opener, especially for Black people in this country. They began to see that there's no way out under the old colonial system or the neo-colonial system for countries in Africa. If they want to develop their nation, and if they want to bypass the stage of capitalism, which will subject them to foreign investors, they have to rely upon the Socialist countries.

EHLERS You think that Vietnam will force, or has forced, a re-assessment of our role in the world?

BLAIR I think it has, yes. I think it has. No longer the feeling that what our president says is right, what our government says is right, and we must never do anything contrary to what our president and our government says. Of course the Watergate exposures and then the exposure of the role that the CIA

[Central Intelligence Agency], the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], these outfits ^{and} in the State Department, played in the subversion of foreign governments and the attempts to overthrow the Cuban revolution. All of these things accumulate to a feeling that hell, you can't believe anything our government says.

EHLERS And that started with Vietnam?

BLAIR I think it did, yes.

EHLERS And was confirmed by Watergate?

BLAIR Yes. Of course there's a continual flow of history. Anti-Communism reached its peak during the period of McCarthyism from around 1950 to 1956. It has left its affect among the older generation. You say Communist and they jump. But the younger generation, it doesn't mean anything to them. Meanwhile the Socialist countries have built themselves up. People have gone to see them and come back impressed. Maybe they don't want to live there, but they have a feeling that there is something in this that is good for the people. And Angola has just awakened an awful lot among Black people who always had a tendency to feel that this is a white man's fight. Even in Vietnam they were sympathetic with the Vietnamese people, but they felt after all, still, what does it mean to us? Maybe jobs, maybe we can get in the army and get somewhere. Then they get in the army and find out they're the ones that are wiped out on a greater percentage than the white soldiers are. The same is true of Chicanos and American Indians. They see well here we're fighting the white man's fight again,

we're fighting colored people. They aren't the same as us, but this is just part of the whole idea of domination over the colored peoples of the world. There's strong sentiment among many Black people that feel the Bicentennial had no meaning to them at all. That's a strong feeling among the Indians, there's no meaning, just two hundred years of white man's rule and that's all. We should mourn and not celebrate.

EHLERS You think, then, that there's a greater alienation between the races in this country because of Vietnam? Or would there be in some ways an opposite affect because of the protest in the country against the war, there might be a sense of unity among....

BLAIR Both forces are at work. After all, we have a small but highly organized and well supplied ruling class which has a whole flock of scientists, of psychologists, economists, and political experts at work. They are specialists in dividing and ruling people. They have a vast communications media at their disposal. There are contradictions within it which enables, once in a while, someone to break through to expose the trends that are going on. They have the whole government apparatus at their disposal. On the one hand they encourage and cultivate everything that leads to dissention among the people, disunity and confusion, including the mass use of drugs. There's no accident that the CIA had a plan to spread LSD among one hundred million people in the population, so that people would flip their wigs and wouldn't be able to do things. It's no accident that drug pushing goes on the way it does.

You get a whole generation that doesn't care about politics, that doesn't care about sociology or anything, but just about a fix. The fact that they're going to be dead in another few years from this doesn't dissuade them. You have a vast crime wave which is cultivated, encouraged by this sort of brain-washing experiment that's going on. Of course there's money in it. Where there's money there's nothing too dirty for a person who wants to make a lot of money and do it fast.

One hundred years ago Marx wrote something about that. If for the sake of an ordinary rate of profit, he says, a businessman will exert himself to the full and fight like the dickens, and he'll be very conservative and very careful and cautious. But double his profit and make it possible for him to double his profit he'll begin to take risks, he'll begin to do all kinds of things in hope of getting more. But make it possible for him to triple and quadruple his profit and there's no action too base that he won't engage in in order to be able to make that extra profit. He also used to say the Church of England is willing to part with all thirty nine Articles of its faith rather than ten percent of its income.

EHLERS How will Vietnam -- will it change this? You see it as the government attempting to create disunity, or the leadership in the country?

BLAIR Yeah. The leadership of the country in applying the government as one of its weapons and of course there's contradictions within the government.

EHLERS Will Vietnam have an affect on this? Will people be less willing to allow the government to create the disunity or....

BLAIR Yeah, I think they'll struggle against it and they're fighting for unity so there's a double edge, there's a double development. There's a growth of dissention, disunity. But there's also a growth of unity. When it comes to the relations between the races in this country -- of course this is one of the few countries in the world where race is an overpowering issue. When it comes to this I think there's a general coalescing and a greater unity than before. These soldiers were fighting together, all the different races and nationalities, and a comradeship, a brotherly, sisterly feeling builds up among them.

EHLERS Within the American military?

BLAIR Yeah, within the military, sure. When they come home it continues to a great extent. It's true they were there together in order to suppress another people. But they developed this feeling. The organizations of the Vietnam veterans are not very strong, but the treatment that the Vietnam veterans are receiving has excited a great deal of indignation and gives rise to certain amount of struggle for unity. On the other side, some of the Vietnamese soldiers were corrupted thoroughly, to the core. We had two policemen, for instance, they got into our Party, both Vietnam veterans. Yet you have other people who are Vietnamese veterans and who turn the other direction, who turn criticism, opposition, and working among the people for unity. The biggest thing that

you can see, which is a long ongoing development, is a complete lack of faith in government and politics. When you can have two presidential candidates nominated and only fifteen percent of the people take part in the primaries. When you can have an election which [Richard M.] Nixon gets in to be president with about twenty percent of the vote, you'll have a great majority of the people not taking part in politics anymore on a national scale, even for congressional district. They take part on the larger scale when it affects their local candidates and local issues.

EHLERS When you say Nixon got in with twenty percent of the vote, you mean of those who were eligible to vote? Many did not vote, and of those who voted?

BLAIR I think you'll find it was about -- the votes that were cast -- well, anyway, he got in. Don't quote me on the percentages, but he got elected on a minority of the votes that were cast, but when you consider the voting population it was a very small percentage of the voting population.

EHLERS Okay, I just

BLAIR You'll find, I think, in Italy there was a much higher percentage of the people voting than the elections here. Now that means a complete turn off to the two party system in this country. That has positive and negative effects. It's positive, which means there's a nascent searching for a new political outlet, for independence. On the other hand, there's a great deal of apathy. A great deal of -- and that isn't good. This nascent searching for a new political outlet can't

be effective unless it's organized. The forces just aren't here to organize it now. The political independence is asserted in a million different ways. For instance, in the Black community the political independence of Black voters shows itself participating in the Democratic Party. My sister-in-law told me on the West Coast that there is also Republican participation. They are tied yet within the two old party system. Which means yet they are tied into the machinery that the ruling class uses to get their people into office. But at the same time they want an outlet where they can vote and they want to get their people in there. These people are responsive to the pressures in their local community. They have to come out. They may want to sell out, they may want to compromise, but when it comes to mistreatment of Blacks in prisons, police brutality, and when it comes to neglect of the needs of people in the various communities, they have to respond, they have to come forward. They're part of the democratic apparatus. The others have to give in somewhat in that direction too. The same is true of women in politics. They have become a ferment, they have become a positive force, moving in the direction of independence, even within the old party development. If you're going to have a new significant party come forward which in essence would be a union of the working class and the Black liberation movement, plus the movements of the women and the youth, the other national minorities besides the Blacks in this country, and of the small farmers -- whatever it would be called -- that

sort of coalition would reawaken the interest in doing things, participating in the government.

EHLERS And you see

BLAIR But its objectives would be different. Its objectives would be to begin to curb the monopolies. It would have to develop in that way because they can't get any of their needs satisfied without curbing the force of this so called power elite within the country.

EHLERS And you see Vietnam as a spur to this realignment?

BLAIR Yes I think it has been that. Then of course the international situation is such too. The growth of the Socialist countries where the growth of their economic system first of all, of their productive apparatus. The United States right after the Vietnam war dominated production in the whole world, and now it's going back into second and third rate position in many respects. Still a tremendous weight in the world productive system. I haven't got any figures, but its quite possible that the total production of the Soviet Union is now reaching a par with that of the United States, and in production of many essential things is far ahead of the United States.

EHLERS How was Vietnam

BLAIR You take the Socialist world as a bloc. . . Well, Vietnam because this was a struggle of people who were committed to Socialism and it strengthened the Socialist world. It was a turning point you see in the world system. China is still within the Socialist world with all of its nationalism and its basing itself upon the mentality of the petty bourgeoisie of

the small producers and the peasants. It's still part of the Socialist world. The total weight of the Socialist world is now decisive in international affairs. They're able to help other countries that are trying to get out from under the yoke of imperialism. Angola is a good example, but you'll have other examples in Africa. Cuba was a very outstanding example. Cuba has bypassed the whole phase of capitalist development. There are countries in Africa like Angola that will jump from tribalism to Socialism without even going through the stages of feudalism to come to capitalism. They're just going to make a whole historical leap. That's what happened to many of the people in the Soviet Union that went from tribal society to advanced industrial society without going through a native capitalist class that they'd have to struggle against. That's because of the aid from the Socialist world. The influence of the Socialist world is having its affects within this country.

EHLERS Well, how did Vietnam weaken the United States' world position?

BLAIR It weakened it in a number of different ways. For one thing, the United States poured billions and billions of dollars of money and poured a lot of its resources and wasted them there in Vietnam. It seemed as if the resources of the United States were endless. But as a result of dumping all those shells, all those chemicals and everything on that small part of the globe, the stock supplies are down a great deal. It also cut off Vietnam as a source of future supplies of oil, of tungsten, of gold, and rubber, all kinds of things, just by the devastation

of the war and by the policy of blockade of Vietnam, refusing to deal with them. The Socialist countries, meanwhile, are dealing with them and helping restore the. . . Not China because China still has designs on Vietnam. They never forget that at one time they ruled over there, maybe a thousand or sixteen hundred years ago. To them any place that any of their emperors have ever ruled has got to come back to them. But the United States is weak in that way. Its moral leadership is shot. Its power to persuade people to accept its ideas has been tremendously weakened. The whole Socialist world system has been strengthened by the addition of however many million peoples there are in there into the Socialist orbit, economically, politically, and the like of that. The idea has taken root among oppressed people all over that the way to get out from under the centuries of exploitation and oppression is not to come to terms with the United States, British, French, Japanese, German imperialism, but rather to begin dealing with the Socialist world where they can get supplies at a low rate of interest, over the long term credits, where there are no political strings attached, rather than to get it from the United States where they have to pay a high rate of interest and give them political influence within the country as well. So that also has -- Vietnam is a watershed in that respect. Cuba was one on a smaller scale. But here's a country -- I guess altogether they're close to -- there's seventy million people in these different segments of Vietnam. North and South

Vietnam together run thirty million. Then there's Laos and Cambodia which are all part of the same general set up. So when you add a chunk of people, and you add other groups, then you can say colonialism is on its last legs and neo-colonialism, which the United States developed first in Latin America -- which means that you don't just go over there and put your governors in there, but you buy up people and have the natives do your dirty work -- that's spoken of as Vietnamization in Vietnam -- well, that thing is completely discredited in the eyes of the people. It doesn't mean it stops, because this struggle goes on until imperialism disappears. As it gets closer to its end it gets more desperate. Hence you got this playing around with the idea of atomic annihilation as the way out.

EHLERS Let me -- you used the expression "Vietnam as a watershed." Let me sort of recap some of the things that you have mentioned that you see Vietnam having affected, then I want to bring something out from the recap. You feel that Vietnam has weakened the United States in its world position. It's had an impact on racial friction, racial division. It's deepened it in some ways, and yet has spurred unity in some other ways. You feel that the disillusionment has caused a lack of faith in the leadership, and a new awareness in the country of a need to set up different priorities. You feel there were changes in the labor alignment, changes in the political structure and political realignments. That there were changes

in the military institutions, changes in social priorities, and you feel it added to social problems. Do you think of these effects

BLAIR I would only qualify to say United States -- I would say United States imperialism. Because as the Vietnamese people always had the greatest friendship for the American people and the greatest hostility to what they called American imperialism, to the ruling class and its policies. That's what suffered. The position of United States imperialism and the United States ruling class. But I don't think that the American people have as a whole suffered in the esteem of the people of the world. On the contrary, the resistance to the Vietnamese war in this country on such a mass scale. . . . You know, they talk about many weird forms and some of the diversionary forms were undoubtedly through the CIA agents in the ranks of the protesters, many freaky forms. But it was such a vast, overwhelming movement of the people, based very strongly among religious segments of the people, that this has won the respect of these people in Asia, Africa, and South America, for the American people as a people. They have vast respect for Americans as Americans, common American people. But they have vast distrust for the ugly American. You remember that book? That was the ugly American that was exposed and whose prestige is just gone. I would make that qualification.

EHLERS Okay. But do you think of these effects -- the political, military, social, labor realignments, disillusionment, etc.,

do you think that all of them, or some of them, will be permanent, or do you think with the dimming of memory, and just getting away from Vietnam time-wise, that it will be just an episode, having no lasting imprint?

BLAIR The dimming of memory is going to take place, there's no doubt about it. The new generation is coming up and they're coming very fast. There's a generation gap in every five years in school. One batch comes out, they're sixteen, then they're twenty, twenty one, then they're old people and they're twenty five. The new gang that's sixteen looks at them as a bunch of old fogies. And of course how would they look at the rest of the older people! I think that idea of the thirty years thing that was here during the sixties is pretty well gone.

EHLERS Don't trust anyone over thirty?

BLAIR Yeah, that's right. I think that notion is pretty well gone. But the fact is that the group that's under sixteen now -- well look, we're at 1976, and back in the sixties these youngsters were so small they didn't know what the heck was going on too much. So it's true that factor is there. But there are certain lasting things that come out of experiences like this.

EHLERS And what would they be?

BLAIR Some good and some bad. The lasting things are -- well, the anti-war feeling. The growing anti-imperialist feeling. The growing antipathy to racism as in ideology. The feeling, the distrust of the leadership. I think these things are hanging

over. We see a new conservatism rising among the high school kids that shows itself in different ways. I mean in dress and clothing and things like that. Along with it there's a revulsion to drugs, but then a switching on to alcohol. These are superficial things, but I'm sure that the effects will last. For one thing we're never going to have -- we're never going to be out of crisis, economic and other crises in this country. The world capital system is in a crisis. The general crisis began with the 1917 revolution in the Soviet Union when a sixth of the world went out of capitalism. That's the beginning of the general crisis of capitalism. But then there was a partial restoration after the panics of 1921 and 1923, I mean the depressions that we had. There was a period of prosperity five or six years, but it wasn't only in the United States, it was in Italy, and it was in France, it was all over. It was a partial restoration of capitalist equilibrium -- that's the way we put it in our lingo. That's what enabled Mussolini to stay in, enabled [Miklos] Horthy in Hungary to stay in. The lack of unity in the German working class enabled Hitler to get into power. But then the big change took place when the people's front movement began to arise in Spain and then in France and fascism got some set backs. In Spain it ^[the People's Front] was defeated. Then in Britain and the United States the movements against fascism resulted in the [Franklin D.] Roosevelt era here and in Britain in changes in their foreign policy from an anti-Soviet one that [Winston] Churchill had dictated and carried through all his life to

the idea of cooperation against the danger of fascism. It didn't come out full blown, but I mean these forces were at work. Now the effects of that resulted in the Grand Alliance in the Second World War where the democratic countries -- so-called -- united with the Soviet Union against fascism. Now the destruction of fascism breached the world capitalist front and about another dozen countries went socialist. This inspired the big colonial upsurges, the result of which in the period of the sixties and the seventies, colonialism practically disappeared from the face of the Earth with the exception of South Africa, Rhodesia, and a few other places. Each one leaves its residue and the effect of the Second World War and the

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[collapse of colonialism] had the repercussions in the complete collapse of the Angola and Mozambique and the other areas. You saw the complete collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire which was the oldest colonial empire, the longest lasting one, and the last one to go. It wasn't as big as the British or the Belgian and the French. But the collapse of these things left the world in a situation where the socialist forces combined with the forces of liberation in the colonies, plus the working class movements in the existing capitalist countries, became stronger than the power of the imperialist forces, stronger than their power to influence world events.

EHLERS And then

BLAIR And therefore we had a situation arise where it was possible for the communist movement to say that new world wars can be prevented. We don't have to -- the inevitability of a new world war was rejected as an idea. The feeling was that the power of these forces could prevent a new world war and could save the world from atomic destruction. Now in China a different theory was accepted, that maybe it would be good for having a world war because there's 700,000,000 Chinese, you can't kill them all, and they could start over again. But imagine what the Czechs think about that. A country that has fifteen or sixteen million would be completely destroyed. They won't have -- ninety percent are gone -- only a couple hundred thousand people left. So that was rejected. The world crisis of capitalism was intensified terrifically by the Vietnamese war and these other developments. Their markets curtailed, hence the competition between the various groups of the capitalist class in different countries gets greater. Their plight gets worse. They have to put the screws on their own people because they can't exploit people in other countries anymore like they used to.

EHLERS But to get back more to the idea of the specific impact on traditional American values, not so much just on the American economic system, but just what America sees itself as -- how will these effects manifest themselves. What changes, very specifically, do you think there will be in American traditional values? You know, you talked about the tradition of -- a revolutionary tradition, a tradition of equality, a tradition

of liberty -- not -- you talked a dual tradition, one of the leadership, but I prefer to refer to the one of the people, the population at large.

BLAIR Well now, the American people are made up of people of all national origins for one thing. There's a solid group here whose roots go back for several generations. I mean those of European stock. Then there was this vast intermixture among those of non-European stock as well. But you can't have socialism developing and moving forward in Italy, for instance, without affecting those of Italian-American origin. Some will be anti, some will be for. The same among the Polish, there's a cumulative affect among people of Polish extraction here. With the two Germanys now, there's West Germany and there's East Germany, but there's an increasing understanding among people of German descent that the anti-fascist Germans were -- that's the kind of tradition that they should latch on to. So for one thing I would say there's a growing interest in socialism and a growing acceptance of the need for some kind of changes of the sort in this country that are developing in these other countries of the world.

EHLERS So

BLAIR Then there's a feeling that the environmental issue - there's the feeling that the kind of leadership that we have can't solve these kinds of problems, that they require a big social change. Not only re-ordering priorities, but a complete re-orientation of the whole country, away from the profit system

towards production for the benefit of the people, towards social needs.

EHLERS So you see a change

BLAIR And that's going among intellectuals as well. This can't but affect the children. When the school teachers begin to learn that there's something wrong, as they are increasingly, they're going to begin to question their text books, they're beginning to invite representatives of other ideas in. They're affecting the school children. There's no longer a feeling that J. Edgar Hoover is the authority on Communism and we should study his books in the schools. Now it's made clear that his books were a racket and he was a crook. Therefore why should he be the mentor of the children. You'll find kids that just simply reject that sort of stuff. You find teachers that do it.- They're afraid if they question too much they'll lose their jobs. But there is this movement going on, and therefore I think the basic values that are beginning to arise are the feelings that only through collective effort and only through a degree of socialization can we begin to solve things. And through a rejection of the profit motive, of the profit system, production and exchange for profit, all the ideas, the mores, that go along with that. The feeling that a person is judged by the amount of money that they have. They're a big man or a big woman if they got a million dollars no matter what the size is. That you're a little person if you don't have a lot of money. If you have money it automatically makes everything that you suggest and do correct. There's

a rejection of that and I think the Vietnamese war intensified that, and by intensifying the whole world crisis of capitalism it becomes clearer and clearer that the United States cannot solve the problems in this country by just having a hundred and four billion dollar war budget, and giving ten billion to Iran, and building factories in South Africa, and so on. They have to come here and pay attention to this country. Since they're not going to get all the supplies from the colonies that they used to get for almost nothing, we're going to have to husband the resources that we have within our boundaries.

EHLERS That makes me think of something interesting. You said, when I asked you sort of to discuss what you thought traditional American values were, you said something like, well there are a set of traditional values that were never really put into effect, and you referred to Jefferson, and I would assume you meant sort of what is incorporated in our Constitution, Bill of Rights -- freedom of speech, the power to oppose -- that the people should have. Maybe, are you saying, that you feel Vietnam will turn us back to the traditional values that were never in effect and possibly make them more important to us.

BLAIR That would be one of the elements of it, but the world of Jefferson is gone forever. The world where you can go out and get a hundred sixty acres of land and make a living is gone forever. If you're going to have the good things, the good points of a democratic outlook upon life, you'll have

to begin thinking in terms of a democracy that embraces the vast majority of the people. And a democracy which in effect will be a dictatorship over the former rulers of the country. Just as this present democracy is in effect a dictatorship of the ruling class over the masses of the people. Very cleverly exercised and so on, but still all final decisions are not made at the ballot box or they're not made by your congressman. They're made by the clique that runs the whole show. I think the feeling that's going to grow, that you need cooperation, you need the unity of the people, and you need a collective effort for collective improvement. You have to reject the idea that I as a person am well off when I have a lot of money and my neighbor is hungry. You got to feel that if my neighbor is hungry then we -- I haven't got a right to be sitting on the top of the world.

EHLERS If one is hungry, all are hungry?

BLAIR If one is -- I would say all are hungry but we have an interest to make sure that nobody is hungry.

EHLERS So then you think that

BLAIR You can see the developments among the farm workers. As they begin to organize and improve their own conditions they ~~tend~~ naturally to join with other groups, other unions. Since so many of them are of Mexican ancestry they become part of the movements for integrated education in schools, Latin and English schools. Against police brutality. It's all these things that affect the people as a whole. Because they suffer they develop a sympathy for the movement of the Blacks,

the movement of the Indians, and then they empathize with the people in other countries who are struggling for their freedom. So the collective movement -- and there's no way out for these people excepting through socialism in this country. There's going to be no massive acceptance of socialism until the people have organized a political force where they can begin to determine the events, can elect enough congresspeople, can elect enough people to office so they can begin to put legislation through. They can begin to reform the governmental structure and eliminate the henchmen of big business that are in the CIA and the FBI and all these places and are in the government apparatus, and just carry out things no matter who is in office. There will have to be a complete clean sweeping of things which will probably come first in the form of these coalitions of the people. Starting in localities. It will be a very complex process. But that's the thing I think. The traditional idea that you should have a say, that my voice is as good as anybody's else's will be changed. The essence will be there, but the feeling will be that we've gotta have a say, that we are all lost unless we have some cooperative work among ourselves. Unless we cooperate, and cooperate for a definite purpose, get together with other people, other groupings of people and cooperate for a larger issue or two. It won't come -- it may come very fast. It takes different forms in different countries. It may come very quickly in a way you just don't visualize at the moment. You know it wasn't the Russian

Communists that developed the Soviet idea. That was the peasants, the soldiers, and the workers that developed it. It just means a council, the council form of doing things. The genius of Lenin was that he recognized here was a new form created by the masses which can be the means of transforming the whole society.

EHlers The major influence, then, that you would see from the Vietnam experience is propelling the United States into a new social and political tradition or alignment - more egalitarian, collective

BLAIR Yeah, that's right. You've come from the organizations of people and some that don't exist now and many that do exist. But only the result of a struggle within each of them against the old limiting, against the tradition of mysticism, and jingoism, and racism, and pornography, you can add sexism. The struggle has to go on continuously, a purifying process. And it is going on if you watch the organization of the people, it's going on in there. For so long as you have a class -- the profit taking class -- in the reigns of power they can always subvert something, a movement that gets underway, and subordinate it to their own purposes.

EHlers So the tradition of struggle that you spoke of has been reaffirmed.

BLAIR That is what I would say. It's definitely on the upsurge. It's definitely going forward. And also this means that the tradition of having a say in what is done is very interesting. The ideas of communism, for instance, are -- the American

Indians, their ideas are basically the same. But of course its Communism in another form, in a wider, expanded scale. But they find it very easy to accept, to understand the ideas of Communism. The problem comes if they have been -- their own traditions are familiar to them. But they see in their own life that the [Bureau of] Indian Affairs puts people in that subverts this common effort. The egotism, the selfishness, and just plain the vices of the white man are divisionary forces among them. Whenever I have spoken where there have been Indians and speak about a general overall approach to Communism I find quite an acceptance of -- like this is something familiar that we know about. But tie up with that Communist Party! That's another thing. That's a no no, they're outcasts. That's why to me reading Marx and Engels and Lenin, these ideas were familiar ideas and answered many questions that I'd been groping for answers and have been arguing with my brother, the one you methere. We've sort of come along together on these things, and my older brother too. We had been groping for answers and couldn't find them. Here we found answers that made sense. Now this is happening to the American people as a whole. They have been trying to find answers within this country and looking at their past, and there are many answers to be found there. If you want to -- when it comes to the question of Vietnam, for instance, there is a tradition of anti-imperialism in this country. Mark Twain and William Dean Howells were the leaders in the movement against the taking over the Philippines.

EHLERS The Spanish American War.

BLAIR Yeah, and opposing the Spanish American War. There are some of our prominent figures were involved in that. There is an anti-imperialist thing, as I said before, it went back to the Mexican war where Lincoln and a whole host of people opposed the conquest of Mexico. So these things come on in a new form. They lie there, they're working among the people, and new situations bring them out. That's why I have complete faith that these young people as they grow up absorbing a lot of junk as they do in the schools and from the media, seeing, learning more about the history of their families, about the history of their country and their own people, they begin to move into a stream in the direction that I tried to indicate, of the rejection of the profit motive and the ideals of the mores, of the morality, and the approaches of the profit system. They're groping for some new collective approach. Because it's a mass phenomena, that's why you can have the Moonies glowing on to so many people.

EHLERS People looking for an ideology or for ideals to

BLAIR That's right. You find the communes growing up all over the country which is a retrogressive movement in the sense that you're not going to solve the problems of American agriculture by buying a farm and living the way people lived a hundred years ago. It's a groping, seeking for some kind -- there's an atomization and at the same time a coming together. It takes all kinds of weird forms like the hippies' pads in the sixties. It takes sometimes very confusing forms and

very reactionary forms. The affect of Wallace, for instance, trying to play on the discontent of the workers by telling them that the way out is to go his way. The Nazis are groping for that.

EHLERS Did you mean George Wallace?

BLAIR George Wallace, yeah, George Wallace. The events in Boston, the recrudescence of the most backward forms of racial hatred and the like of that among the Irish people who themselves have been ground down. Its a constant up swirling. As Gus [Hall] put it in one of his reports that he gave, there's a political swarming going on in the country where you haven't found the queen bees yet to cause the bees to settle and form their hives all over.

EHLERS So you see Vietnam, in some ways as a catalyst

BLAIR That's right.

EHLERS A search for some sort of national tradition that better embodies what we feel we could be.

BLAIR Yeah. We feel as Americans that we have great pride in being Americans, but we would like to see our country be something we can truly be proud of, that'll eliminate a lot of these bad things. I think that's a mass feeling in the United States, and until they see that it's the profit system and the profiteers in this country, that it's the big monopoly owners that are the obstacle, you won't have this swarming of the political bees to the extent that it should take place. It's possible to divert that discontent into all kinds of channels, the backward, reactionary, divisive channels.

EHLERS You see Vietnam also as a -- as revealing the problems very nakedly.

BLAIR Yeah, that's right. And we got more Vietnams to come. Lets hope there won't be too many of them. But Iran, there's one developing. Israel is another.

EHLERS Well don't you think perhaps

BLAIR Lebanon is another.

EHLERS This Vietnam experience, if it has some of the effects that you feel it will, might prevent further Vietnams?

BLAIR Oh I think so. I think definitely. Even when the Journal has to write an editorial like they did yesterday.

EHLERS Milwaukee Journal?

BLAIR Milwaukee Journal. They have their ears to the ground. They're a very conservative, reactionary paper. But they say Iran could become another Vietnam and we better get the hell out of there, we better not be doing that.

EHLERS Well, could you, in a nut shell, do me a just a little summary as to focusing the feelings you've expressed and the ideas you've expressed as to the most important thing you think Vietnam will do in the long run to our national values?

BLAIR To put that into a nut shell is very hard. I went into so many things and not in the best organized way.

EHLERS Well did you

BLAIR I would think for one thing it has shaken American chauvinism and jingoism to the core. Secondly, it has shaken the naive belief that we are a democratic country that is always out to

do good for everybody and can never do any wrong. It's been made clear that our presence in some countries is death, is just poison, and that we can make an awful lot of mistakes. Thirdly, I think its shaken faith in the leadership of the class that's in power, but in the leadership of politicians who went along with this sort of thing. Shaken faith in that. Fourthly, I think there is a feeling that you can do something to retrieve the reputation of the country that has been tarnished by the kind of leadership that it has through your own united action with other people regardless of race, religion, color, creed, sex, and age. There's that. I'd say fifthly there's a growing awareness that just -- if you profit individually from something that doesn't make it right. Therefore sometimes you have to forego an immediate gain for the sake of a long term gain for more people. We are not yet in the stage that the British working class was in the Civil War when they voluntarily fought against the British participation on the side of the South even though this meant that they lost their jobs. They couldn't get cotton and they lost their jobs in their factories, and there was real hunger and starvation. Yet their solidarity with the struggle for abolishing slavery was so strong that they'd forego their immediate interest for the sake of long term destruction of that blight on civilization, chattel slavery in the United States. We haven't reached that thing, but there are -- there's a growing consciousness of -- along such lines. The opposition for instance in the Black community to Roy Innes'

recruitment of mercenaries to fight in Angola. Some of your family might make two, three hundred bucks a week if they go down there, but the feeling was that we had no business to be there. If one Black person is fighting another one so to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the Portuguese and for American business. Little samples, things like that are arising. We'll have to see if the future lies in concerted struggle and in clarifying, well, you put it priorities, but clarifying the understanding of what the objectives are for the long pull, the things that will be helpful in the long pull. Vietnam was only one element. It was a powerful element to create this whole new ferment in the country, out of which change and progress will come. I think it gives us cause for great optimism and cause for great pride in being Americans that our people fought against that war the way they did. From church leaders and trade unionists, and young people particularly bore the brunt of it. They fought in so many imaginative and different ways including some wrong ways. But the sum total of it was that the tiger had to pull his paws back out, got his paws burned. They will never again be able to go ahead and do things on that scale again. They'll never be able -- they'll build a mercenary army which they'll use against other people and against the people of this country, but history shows that mercenary armies cannot save a dying class or a dying power. The Czar couldn't save himself with his huge military apparatus. It just disintegrated, and that apparatus, the soldiers

themselves, became the means of finishing him. Look who's coming. [The cat.] So I think that will happen here too. They're hoping to have a pure, uncorrupted mercenary army in this country. That means a big expense. That means a hell of a lot of money. It's a substitute for the armed people. We have the tradition of the armed people in this country which they're trying to take away from the people. Now I don't go along with these guys that holler if you outlaw guns only outlaws would have guns. It's crazy. But the tendency is to set up the government to be more and more a police state, a police apparatus. It's used first against the people right within their own country and it's no longer a national army to defend the country.

EHLERS But you think Vietnam will have put people wise to that?

BLAIR Yeah, I think it will. We'll reach a situation where if they have a mercenary army and its used a few times against the people -- a situation where people will spit when they see a soldier -- it'll be like the soldier of the British Empire -- Tom -- [Rudyard] Kipling was picturing it. You know, Tommy here and Tommy there, and so on. Well, Tommy Atkins that he was nothing but a bum until there was a war to be fought and then he was a hero, and then he was a bum again when the war was over. That's pretty much the Vietnamese soldier. They're bums now. They were heroes then but they're bums now. Their families feel it, their children are going to feel it. The word gets around among the younger generation. Memory dims, but there's still the living figure here to look at.

EHLERS Overall you are optimistic.

BLAIR Oh very optimistic.

EHLERS The whole experience

BLAIR This thing is going to develop very fast

EHLERS Will lead us into a social progression and a political progression that can only benefit the country?

BLAIR Yeah. The United States will go to socialism its own way. The Italians' experiences and the French experiences are eye openers to a certain respect. And the Portuguese. Each one is different, but the essence of them all is the same. It's cooperation of different classes, with the working class playing an increasingly leading role. Cooperation of various parties where national survival depends upon taking the resources of the country, and the disposition of them, out of the hands of a small clique that is only interested in their own profits. They continually betrayed the country to some other nation. It becomes a matter of national survival. That's what happened in Hungary. There was no way out for them but socialism. Every class that they had depended on for leadership had sold out to Hitler, betrayed them. The same thing happened with Czechoslovakia and Poland. All their traditional leaders for a thousand years, who have betrayed them for a thousand years, was in the process of doing it again. And therefore there was no way. The communists, the socialists, the peasant party, even sections of the former Horthy apparatus felt that the only way out

was to take that property and put it in the hands of the people, to socialize.

EHLERS So you

BLAIR When you make that step you can't go back.

EHLERS You feel that Vietnam will make our population at large so much more aware that they won't allow the leadership of the country to do things that are a betrayal to their most important interests.

BLAIR Yeah, I think that they'll work in that direction. Whether they succeed or not will depend upon a number of other things. The international atmosphere is such that the power of maneuvering of all these imperialist countries is narrowing very much. The contradictions within them are narrowing. You see the contradiction between the Canadian and American capitalist class is -- the battle is going on over tariffs, over publications, and over American domination of Canadian industry, American misuse. . . I never realized how bad it is, but the same pollution that we have here is covering vast areas of Northern Canada as well as the United States. Corporations go in and just extract stuff and just dump the garbage all over the landscape. You haven't got a lake where you can drink the water out of it up in the Northern Canada. They're all polluted, the rivers are all polluted, the fish are full of mercury, and it's just like it is down here in a country of only about twenty million people in a bigger area than this. It's the United States capital particularly, but also from other countries, come in there

and just. . . It's the same process that they used here to accumulate their fortunes that they're using there, which is the most wasteful and reckless method of developing a country.

EHLERS Well

BLAIR West Germany is in conflict with France and with England and with the United States. They're competing for markets. The United States stubbornly hangs onto the anti-Communist philosophy of government, refuses to deal with Vietnam, Cuba, or the Soviet Union. Everytime there's tentative moves made then [Ronald] Reagon comes forward, or somebody else, and blocks it. Or they get [George] Meany, or a reactionary labor leader who's more reactionary than [John D.] Rockefeller himself to come forward and put something in the way. Meanwhile the business goes to West Germany, to France, to other countries, and to Canada, take a more realistic approach. The maneuvering power is less here. There's still vast sums of money, there's still people who can be bought, and the United States capitalist class can still make a lot of mischief and even destroy the world. But the forces against it. . . They've reached the situation where in order to continue with this sort of policy they have to put the screws on here.

EHLERS So a more realistic approach....

BLAIR Yeah. Also the resistance comes from down below. The people who -- well take American Motors [Corporation]. Now it's closing down its Milwaukee plant. Seven thousand five hundred workers, many women among them too, many minority workers there.

The unemployment is now 7 8/10 percent.

BEGIN SIDE A TAPE III

I'm very optimistic because the objective situation in the world at large and in the United States is such that narrowing opportunities for American imperialism to maneuver has created a situation in which every step they take to get out of their difficulties increases the contradictions within the country, increases the class struggle and develops forces who will move against what they are trying to do. Therefore the forces are bound to coalesce and congeal, and in this, as in Vietnam, the role of leadership plays a great deal. A lot depends on the American Communists. Without the leadership of Ho Chi Mihn and the Communists in Vietnam they couldn't have succeeded. And similar things is going to be true of the United States. That doesn't mean that the Communist Party will become the only party, but it means that the ferment of these ideas are there. In capitulation you might say that there was a time we were practically the only people who were saying we should get out of Vietnam, we should withdraw all troops from Vietnam. In the course of a few years this became the demand of the majority of the American people. When they accepted it they didn't say, well, we say that because the Communists said it because we said what was right. We felt from our examination of things that it was the correct thing to say. Was the truth, was the way out. That became obvious and that's happening continually.

C* That's what will happen in the course of these struggles. It will never re-arise that not only Communists, but other people, will come forward, will have correct ideas, and they'll coalesce and that's what will become a majority movement in the country which will transform not only the administration, but will transform the functioning, the objectives of the government and the whole system of operation within the country.

EHLERS Well, thank you Fred.

BLAIR You're welcome.

EHLERS I appreciate your giving me the time.

BLAIR Now I hope you can get something good out of this.

O

CAROLINE K. EHLERS
5800 Wilmett Road
Bethesda, Maryland 20034

PERSONAL

Born: November 27, 1940, Marion, Iowa
Married: to E. Michael Ehlers, August 22, 1964
One son: Abraham M. Ehlers, born March 28, 1971

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

1974 -	University of Maryland College Park, Maryland (American Diplomatic History)	M.A. program in progress
1963 - 1964	New School for Social Research New York, New York (Italian Literature)	
1959 - 1963	Mount Holyoke College South Hadley, Massachusetts (Major: History. Minors: Art History; Italian.) Summer 1962 Experiment in Inter- national Living, Reggio Calabria, Italy.	B.A.

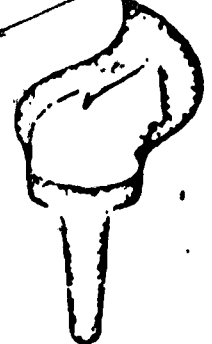
WORK EXPERIENCE

1968 - 1969	Richter McBride Productions, Inc. New York, New York Researcher and writer for political and environmental films.
1964 - 1968	Semmes & Semmes Washington, D.C. Patent, Copyright, and Trademark research; legal research; preparation of draft legal briefs, client progress reports, and correspondence.
1963 - 1964	Hackemann & Associates New York, New York Office Manager, secretarial duties; Administered individual and corporation- wide psychological tests; coordinated seminar on personnel management.

VOLUNTEER WORK

1976	Worked on Frank Mankiewicz primary campaign bid for Congress.
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- 1974 Worked on Woodrow Allen campaign for
Maryland State Senate.
- 1972 Worked on George S. McGovern campaign for
President.
- 1970 Coordinated environmental issues project
for Baltimore Environmental Action
branch.



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IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 17, 1979

PRESS RELEASE

The Wisconsin Civil Liberties Union Foundation, and Mary Blair, a resident of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have settled her 1977 Federal District Court case against six former Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agents *3 of whom were* in charge of the FBI office in Milwaukee from 1959 through 1962.

The settlement terms include a \$48,000 payment to Mary Blair by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, under the Federal Tort Claims Act.

The FBI's own records and files on Mary Blair demonstrate she was in 1960-61 a victim of the COINTELPRO Program. This FBI counter-intelligence domestic surveillance activity involved fundamental violations of individual and organization civil rights and civil liberties. The COINTELPRO activity involved not only unauthorized, illegal FBI surveillance of individuals who were not suspected of violating any law but, in addition, as in this case and others, the FBI activities intended to and did have the effect of causing irreparable personal injury to the individuals.

The true nature of the FBI program and the identities of the individual victims was not revealed to the public until September, 1973, when the U.S. Department of Justice released documents describing in part the COINTELPRO Program. Then on November 18, 1974, then Attorney General Saxbe released further details of the Program. Thereafter on June 23, 1976, the Department of Justice, Office of Professional Responsibility, contacted Mary Blair indicating she "may have been affected by an FBI counter-intelligent program in 1961." During 1961 and at all relevant times Mary Blair was a member of the Communist Party of Wisconsin and married to Fred Blair, chairperson of the Communist Party of Wisconsin.

In response to Mary Blair's request for information from the Department of Justice, the FBI submitted documents to her. These FBI documents demonstrated how FBI agents in Milwaukee and Washington successfully engineered her termination from employment. During 1960 and 1961 she was employed by the Olson Publishing Company in Milwaukee and the FBI transmitted "anonymous"

letters to Olson questioning the advisability of her continued employment there. When this plan was not successful, the FBI then sent Communist literature to seventeen Olson employees to purposely lead these employees to believe Mary Blair mailed the literature. The apparent purpose of these FBI actions was to impede the Blair's plan at that time to purchase home. These FBI actions were successful; in the own words of the FBI "...the mailing [by the FBI] of Communist Party literature to seventeen employees of the Olson Publishing Company had its desired effect upon the employees and executives of the Olson Publishing Company...as a result she has been discharged."

FBI Memorandum, 11/13/61.

Similarly, the FBI through its counter-intelligence mailings was responsible for Mary Blair's removal from her den mother position with the Boy Scouts of America.

The Civil Liberties Union believes this timely settlement is particularly noteworthy as it appears to be the first COINTELPRO federal case settled. Mary Blair and the Civil Liberties Union believes this immediate settlement is preferable to an extended trial and lengthy appeals recognizing the events happened nearly 20 years ago and the concomitant difficult proof problems present. In addition, one of the primary defendants William Sullivan former assistant to J. Edgar Hoover, was killed by a gun-shot wound on November 9, 1977 therefore making a considerable body of information unavailable.

The Civil Liberties Union and Mary Blair believe this settlement provides a partial vindication for the violation of basic and fundamental human and constitutional rights that all people must have. The only action more egregious than a violation of these rights is when the individuals are violating the rights of government agents and agencies.

The use of police spies and police surveillance of this type offends the fundamental notion that individuals have the right to associate among themselves to achieve social or political objectives in which they believe without government interference. Police infiltration and counter-intelligence activities leads individuals to believe any organization they may choose to join may be so interfered with. Consequently membership and political activity is discouraged and constitutionally protected activity is chilled.

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